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# IRI Intelligence Memorandum

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"THE COMMUNIST PARTY AND PARLIAMENTARIANISM"

From the Comintern Theses and Statutes of 1920  
to the Soviet Party Congress of 1956

This report is not a statement of USIA policy.

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### INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Soviet Communist leader Khrushchev at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union on February 14, 1956, modified the traditional Marxist line towards parliamentary activity. The Party Secretary not only defined the correct approach of Communists to participation in bourgeois democratic elective bodies but also declared that socialism under certain circumstances could be achieved through parliamentarianism as follows:

"In this connection the question arises of whether it is possible to go over to socialism by using parliamentary means. No such course was open to the Russian Bolsheviks who were the first to effect this transition. Lenin showed us another road -- that of the establishment of a republic of Soviets, the only correct road in those historical conditions. Following that course, we achieved a victory of worldwide historical significance.

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"The right wing bourgeois parties and their governments are suffering bankruptcy with increasing frequency. In these circumstances, the working class, by rallying around itself the toiling peasantry, the intelligentsia, all patriotic forces, and resolutely repulsing the opportunist elements who are incapable of giving up the policy of compromise with the capitalists and landlords, is in a position to defeat the reactionary forces opposed to the popular interest, to capture a stable majority in parliament, and transform the latter from an organ of bourgeois democracy into a genuine instrument of the people's will.

"In such an event this institution, traditional in many highly-developed capitalist countries, may become an organ of genuine democracy -- democracy for the working people.

"The winning of a stable parliamentary majority backed by a mass revolutionary movement of the proletariat and of all the working people could create for the working class of a number of capitalist and former colonial countries and conditions needed to secure fundamental social changes."

In order to insure that their Communist comrades would not construe these new instructions as an abandonment of the Communist Parties' struggle for power, the following additional explanation of the line was offered the Congress

by Anastas Mikoyan, Number Three man in the Politburo, on February 16:

"There may be benighted theoreticians, dogmatists, or people innocent of political experience who ask: This being the problem, what then is the difference between Marxism and reformism? Is this not the road elected by the revisionists of Marxism? The reformists and revisionists always, now as before, strove and continue to strive to limit the struggle of the working class to small-scale reforms, to concessions of capital to labor, to mitigate to a certain extent the living conditions of the workers under capitalism while firmly maintaining the rule of the capitalist regime.

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"There are cases where certain socialist parties have gained majorities in parliaments. In some countries there were, and still are, even socialist governments. However, even then things are restricted to only small concessions in favor of the workers; no socialism is built. It is necessary for the state and the leadership of society to pass over to the working class; the working class must be prepared not only organizationally but also politically and theoretically for the struggle to socialism, so that it may not be satisfied with crumbs from the capitalist table but will obtain majority, take power into its own hands and liquidate private ownership of the basic means of production.

"Historical materialism teaches that the replacement of capitalism by a classless society constitutes a revolutionary jump. This transfer is in its essence, a revolutionary change of one social order into another. Therefore, any transfer from capitalism to socialism, a change in social relations is revolution, varying in acuteness, but nevertheless revolution which all peoples will experience."

In this respect, it is important to keep in mind that the Theses and Statutes of the Third or Communist International adopted by the Second Comintern Congress in July-Aug. 1920 still remain the governing laws for the Communist Parties, though many changes have occurred in the world Communist organization since that time, most notably the dissolution of the Comintern. Particularly important for an understanding of the above ukases is Section Five, concerning "the Communist Party and Parliamentarism," which is reproduced below.

Field or media users of this material may find a use for additional sections of this basic document, whose contents are as follows:

1. Statutes of the Communist International.
2. Fundamental Tasks of the Communist International.

3. Condition of Admission to the Communist International,
4. Role of the Communist Party in the Proletarian Revolution,
5. The Communist Party and Parliamentarism (sic),
6. The Trade Union Movement.
7. When and Under What Conditions Soviets of Workers' Deputies Should Be Formed,
8. Thesis on the National and Colonial Question.
9. Thesis on the Agrarian Question.

In Section Five of the Theses, which has been reproduced below in its entirety, the Communist International, maintaining the position that a "new epoch" had been reached in 1920, called for the "blowing up" or destruction of all bourgeois state institutions, including parliaments, in an all-out political class struggle for power. Communists were instructed that when they entered such institutions they did so chiefly for purposes of propaganda, subversion and organizing the masses so as to encompass the "destruction of the capitalistic system." This line, identified as "revolutionary parliamentarism", in contrast to the ineffective "anti-parliamentarism" conducted by other anti-bourgeois parties in the past, was to be governed dictatorially by democratic centralist principles which would control loyal Party members in all phases of their participation in parliamentary activities. Insshort, according to these regulations, a Communist member of a conventional bourgeois parliament was not a "legislator", but was bound by party instructions to enter into parliamentary activities only in order to destroy the parliament itself.

Careful scrutiny of this section of the 1920 theses and statutes will show that the words of Khrushchev and Mikoyan are intended as an important revision. Communism no longer "repudiates the possibility of winning over parliaments." It does contemplate, under current circumstances, the possibility of a "bloodless" revolution, which entails exploiting parliaments more as voting organizations and less as platforms for propaganda and agitation as prescribed in 1920. Presumably Soviet leaders see in the official policy of Soviet friendship and aid to the various countries and in mass agitation by the front organizations (both potent arms of Communism that were largely unknown in 1920) means of permanently influencing voting opinion in the various non-Communist countries that were not even dreamed of by the early Bolsheviks. At the same time, while they thus attempt to remind Communists that the takeover of power does not necessarily have to occur in a climactic moment of violence, and

that they would prefer it otherwise, Soviet leaders make clear that the ultimate goal of takeover must be kept clearly in mind. To this extent violence in its various forms -- para-military organizations, and other instruments of civil war or coup d'etat -- is to be retained first and foremost as an agency for preserving the Party from destruction, but also as a constant "adjunct" of "peaceful take-over." Mikoyan's warning that however gradual the transfer of authority it will nevertheless be a "revolutionary jump" which will ultimately impress people that Communism is not a reformist tea party, is a reminder that parliamentarianism with its free elections will be eventually destroyed.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY

AND

PARLIAMENTARISM (sic)

I. The New Epoch and the New Parliamentarism.

The attitude of the Socialist Parties towards parliamentarism was originally, at the time of the First International, one of utilizing the bourgeois parliament for purposes of agitation. Participation in parliamentary activity was looked upon from the point of view of developing class consciousness, i. e., of awakening in the proletariat class hostility toward the ruling class. Changes in this attitude were brought about not through change of doctrine, but under the influence of political development. Owing to the uninterrupted advance of the forces of production and the widening sphere of capitalist exploitation, capitalism, and together with it the parliamentary state, acquired a lasting stability.

This gave rise to the adaptability of the parliamentary tactics of the Socialist parties to "organic" legislative activity in the bourgeois parliament, and the ever growing significance of the struggle for reforms within the capitalist system, as well as the predominating influence of the so-called "immediate demand" and the conversion of the maximum programme into a figure of speech as an altogether remote "final goal." This served as a basis for the development of parliamentary careerism, corruption, and open or hidden betrayal of the fundamental interests of the working class.

The attitude of the Third International towards parliamentarism is determined not by a new doctrine, but by the changed goal of parliamentarism itself. During the previous epoch parliament performed a certain progressive function as the weapon of developing capitalism, but under the present conditions of unbridled Imperialism, parliament has become a tool of falsehood, deceit, violence, and enervating gossip. In the ruin, parliamentary reforms, devoid of system, of constancy, and of definite plan, have lost every practical significance for the working masses.

Parliament has lost its stability like the whole of bourgeois society. The sudden transition from the organic to the critical epoch has created the foundation for new proletarian tactics in the field of parliamentarism. The Russian Workers' Party (Bolsheviks) had already worked out the essence of revolutionary parliamentarism in the preceding period, owing to the fact that Russia, since 1905, had lost its political and social equilibrium and had entered upon the period of storm and stress.

To the extent that some Socialists with an inclination for Communism point out that the moment of revolution in their respective countries has not yet arrived, and so decline to break away from the parliamentary opportunists, they are reasoning consciously or unconsciously from the assumption that the present epoch is one of relative stability for imperialist society, and they are assuming, therefore, that practical results may be achieved in the struggle for reform by a coalition with such men as Turati and Longuet. As soon as Communism comes to light, it must begin to elucidate the character of the present epoch (the culminations of capitalism, imperialistic self-negation and self-destruction, uninterrupted growth of civil war, etc.). Political relationships and political groupings may be different in different countries, but the essence of the matter is everywhere the same; we must start with the direct preparation for a proletarian uprising, politically and technically, for the destruction of the bourgeoisie and for the creation of the new proletarian state.

Parliament at present can in no way serve as the arena of a struggle for reform, for improving the lot of the working people, as it has at certain periods of the preceding epoch. The centre of gravity of political life at present has been completely and finally transferred beyond the limits of parliament. On the other hand, owing not only to its relationship to the working masses, but also to the complicated mutual relations within the various groups of the bourgeois itself, the bourgeoisie is forced to have some of its policies in one way or another passed through parliament, where the various cliques haggle for power, exhibit their strong sides and betray their weak ones, get themselves unmasked, etc., etc. Therefore, it is the immediate historical task of the working class to tear this apparatus out of the hands of the ruling classes, to break and destroy it, and to create in its place a new proletarian apparatus. At the same time, however, the revolutionary general staff of the working class is vitally concerned in having its scouting parties in the parliamentary institutions of the bourgeoisie, in order to facilitate this task of destruction.

Thus, the fundamental difference between the tactics of Communists entering parliament with revolutionary aims in view, and the tactics of the socialist parliamentarians, becomes perfectly clear. The latter act on the assumption of the relative stability and the indefinite durability of the existing order, they consider it their task to achieve reforms by all means and are concerned to make the masses appreciative of every accomplishment as the merit of Social Democratic parliamentarism (Turati, Longuet & Co.).

Instead of the old compromising parliamentarism a new parliamentarism has come to life, as a weapon for the destruction of parliamentarism as a whole. But the aversion towards the traditional practices of the old parliamentarism drives some revolutionary elements into the camp of the opponents of parliamentarism on principle (I. W. W., the revolutionary Syndicalists, German Communist Labor Party).

Taking all this into consideration, the Second Congress adopts the following theses:

**II. Communism, the Struggle for the Dictatorship of the Proletariat, and the Utilization of the Bourgeois Parliament.**

1. Parliamentarism as a State system, has become a "democratic" form of rule of the bourgeoisie which, at a certain stage of its development, needs the fiction of national representation, which outwardly would be an organization of a "national will" standing outside of classes, but in reality is an instrument of oppression and suppression in the hands of the ruling capitalists.

2. Parliamentarism is a definite form of State order. Therefore, it can in no way be a form of Communist society, which recognizes neither classes, nor class struggle, nor any form of State authority.

3. Parliamentarism cannot be a form of proletarian government during the transition period between the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie and that of the proletariat. At the moment when the accentuated class struggle turns into civil war, the proletariat must inevitably form its State organization as a fighting organization, which cannot contain any of the representatives of the former ruling classes; all fictions of a "national will" are harmful to the proletariat at that time, and a parliamentary division of authority is needless and injurious to it; the only form of proletarian dictatorship is a Republic of Soviets.

4. The bourgeois parliaments, which constitute one of the most important instruments of the State machinery of the bourgeoisie, cannot be won over by the proletariat any more than can the bourgeois order in general. The task of the proletariat consists in blowing up the whole machinery of the bourgeoisie, in destroying it, and all the parliamentary institutions with it, whether they be republican or constitutional-monarchical.

5. The same relates to the local government institutions of the bourgeoisie, which theoretically it is not correct to differentiate from State organizations. In reality they are part of the same apparatus of the State machinery of the bourgeoisie which must be destroyed by the revolutionary proletariat and replaced by local Soviets of Workers' Deputies.



6. Consequently, Communism repudiates parliamentarism as the form of the future; it renounces the same as a form of the class dictatorship of the proletariat; it repudiates the possibility of winning over the parliaments; its aim is to destroy parliamentarism. Therefore, it is only possible to speak of utilizing the bourgeois State organizations with the object of destroying them. The question can be discussed only and exclusively on such a plane.

7. All class struggle is a political struggle, because it is finally a struggle for power. Any strike, when it spreads through the whole country, is a menace to the bourgeois State, and thus acquires a political character. To strive to overthrow the bourgeoisie, and to destroy its State, means to carry on political warfare. To create one's own class apparatus -- for the bridling and suppression of the resisting bourgeoisie, whatever such an apparatus may be -- means to gain political power.

8. Consequently, the question of a political struggle does not end in the question of one's attitude towards the parliamentary system. It is a general condition of the class struggle of the proletariat, insofar as the struggle grows from a small and personal one to a general struggle for the overthrow of the capitalist order as a whole.

9. The elementary means of the struggle of the proletariat against the rule of the bourgeoisie is, first of all, the method of mass demonstrations. Such mass demonstrations are prepared and carried out by the organized masses of the proletariat, under the direction of a united, disciplined, centralized Communist Party. Civil war is war. In this war the proletariat must have its efficient political officers, its good political general staff, to conduct operations during all the stages of that fight.

10. The mass struggle means a whole system of developing demonstrations growing ever more acute in form, and logically leading to an uprising against the capitalist order of government. In this warfare of the masses developing into a civil war, the guiding party of the proletariat must, as a general rule, secure every and all lawful positions, making them its auxiliaries in the revolutionary work, and subordinating such positions to the plans of the general campaign, that of the mass struggle.

11. One such auxiliary support is the rostrum of the bourgeois parliament. Against participation in a political campaign one should not use the argument that parliament is a bourgeois government institution. The Communist Party enters such institutions not for the purpose of organization work, but in order to blow up the whole bourgeois machinery and the parliament itself from within (for instance, the work of Liebknecht in Germany, of the Bolsheviks in the Imperial Duma, in the "Democratic Conference," in the "Parliament" of Kerensky, and lastly, in the "Constituent Assembly," and also in the Municipal Dumas, and the activities of the Bulgarian Communists).

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12. This work within the parliaments, which consists chiefly in making revolutionary propaganda from the parliamentary platform, the denouncing of enemies, the ideological unification of the masses, who are still looking up to the parliamentary platform, captivated by democratic illusions, especially in backward territories, etc., must be fully subordinated to the objects and tasks of the mass struggle outside the parliaments.

The participation in the elective campaign and the revolutionary propaganda from the parliamentary tribune has a special importance for the winning over of those elements of the workers, who -- as perhaps the agrarian working masses -- have stood far away from the revolutionary movement and political life.

13. If the Communists have the majority in the local government institutions, they must: (a) carry on a revolutionary opposition against the bourgeois central authority; (b) do all for the aid of the poor population (economic measures, establishment or attempt to establish an armed workers' militia); (c) point out on every occasion the barriers which the bourgeois State power puts against really great changes; (d) develop on this basis the sharpest revolutionary propaganda without fearing a conflict with the State authorities; (e) under certain conditions substitute local Workers' Councils for the municipal administration. The whole activity of the Communists in the communal administration therefore must be a part of the general work of destruction of the capitalistic system.

14. The elective campaign must be carried on not in the sense of obtaining a maximum of votes, but in that of a revolutionary mobilization of the masses around the mottoes of the proletarian revolution. The election campaign must be conducted by the entire mass of party members, not by the leaders alone; it is necessary to make use of and be in complete touch with all the manifestations of the masses (strikes, demonstrations, movements among the soldiers and sailors, etc.) going on at the moment; it is necessary to summon all the masses of the proletarian organizations to active work.

15. In complying with all these conditions, as well as with those indicated in a special instruction, the parliamentary work must present a direct contrast to the dirty "politics" which has been practised by the Social Democratic parties of all countries, that enter parliament with the object of supporting that "democratic" institution or, at best, to "win it over." The Communist Party can only recommend a revolutionary use of the parliament as exemplified by Karl Liebknecht, Haeglund and the Bolsheviks.

16. "Anti-parliamentarism," in principle, in the sense of an absolute and categorical repudiation of participation in the elections and the parliamentary revolutionary work, cannot, therefore, bear criticism, and is a naive, childish doctrine, which is founded sometimes on a healthy disgust of politicians, but which does not understand the possibilities of revolutionary parliamentarism. Besides, very often this doctrine is connected with a quite erroneous idea of the role of the party, which in this case is considered not as a fighting, centralized, advance guard of the workers, but as a decentralized system of badly joined revolutionary nuclei.

17. On the other hand, an acknowledgment of the value of parliamentary work in no wise leads to an absolute, in-all-and-any-case acknowledgment of the necessity of concrete elections and a concrete participation in parliamentary sessions. The matter depends upon a series of specific conditions. Under certain circumstances it may become necessary to leave the parliament. The Bolsheviks did so when they left the pre-parliament in order to break it up, to weaken it, and to set up against it the Petrograd Soviet, which was then prepared to head the uprising; they acted in the same way in the Constituent Assembly on the day of its dissolution, converting the Third Congress of Soviets into the centre of political events. In other circumstances a boycotting of the elections may be necessary, and a direct, violent storming of both the great bourgeois State apparatus and the parliamentary bourgeois clique, or a participation in the elections with a boycott of the parliament itself, etc.

18. In this way, while recognizing as a general rule the necessity of participating in the election to the central parliament, and the institutions of local self-government, as well as in the work in such institutions, the Communist Party must decide the question concretely, according to the specific conditions of the given moment. Boycotting the elections or the parliament, or leaving the parliament, is permissible, chiefly when there is a possibility of an immediate transition to an armed fight for power.

19. At the same time one must constantly bear in mind the relative unimportance of this question. If the center of gravity lies in the struggle for the power outside the parliament, then naturally the question of a proletarian dictatorship and a mass fight for it is immeasurably greater than the secondary one of using the parliament.

20. Therefore the Communist International insists categorically that it considers any division or attempt at a division within the Communist Parties along this line a crime against the labor movement. The Congress calls upon all the elements which are in favor of the mass struggle for the proletarian dictatorship, and of being under the direction of a centralized party of the

revolutionary proletariat for gaining influence over all the mass organizations of the working class, to strive for a complete unity between the Communist elements, notwithstanding any possible disagreement on the question of utilizing the bourgeois parliaments.

### III. Revolutionary Parliamentarism.

For securing the real execution of revolutionary parliamentary tactics it is necessary that:

1. The Communist Party in general and its Central Committee should, during the preparatory stage, before the parliamentary elections, inspect very carefully the quality of the personnel of the parliamentary factions. The Central Committee should be responsible for the parliamentary Communist faction. The Central Committee shall have the undeniable right to reject any candidate of any organizations, if it is not perfectly convinced that such candidate will carry on a real Communist policy while in parliament.

The Communist parties must desist from the old Social Democratic habit of electing as delegates only the so-called "experienced" parliamentarians, chiefly lawyers and so on. As a rule workmen should be put forward as candidates, without troubling about the fact that these may be sometimes simple rank-and-file workmen. The Communist Party must treat with merciless contempt all elements who try to make a career by joining the party just before the elections in order to get into parliament. The Central Committees of Communist parties must sanction the candidacy of only such men as by long years of work have proved their unwavering loyalty to the working class.

2. When the elections are over, the organization of the parliamentary factions must be wholly in the hands of the Central Committee of the Communist Party -- whether the party in general is a lawful or unlawful one at the given moment. The chairman and the bureau of the parliamentary faction of Communists must be confirmed in their functions by the Central Committee of the Party. The Central Committee of the Party must have its permanent representative in the parliamentary faction with the right of veto. On all important political questions the parliamentary faction shall get preliminary instructions from the Central Committee of the Party.

At each forthcoming important debate of the Communists in the parliament, the Central Committee shall be entitled and bound to appoint or reject the orator of the faction, to demand that he submit previously the theses of his speech, or the text, for confirmation by the Central Committee, etc. Each candidate entered in the list of the Communists must sign a paper to the effect

that at the first request of the Central Committee of the Party he shall be bound to give up his mandate, in order that in a given situation the act of leaving the parliament may be executed in unison.

3. In countries where reformist, semi-reformist or simply career-seeking elements have managed to penetrate into the parliamentary faction of the Communists (as has already happened in several places), the Central Committees of the Communist Parties are bound radically to weed out the personnel of the factions, on the principle that it is better for the cause of the working class to have a small but truly Communist faction than a large one without a regular Communist line of conduct.

4. A Communist delegate, by decision of the Central Committee, is bound to combine lawful work with unlawful work. In countries where the Communist delegate enjoys a certain inviolability, this must be utilized by way of rendering assistance to illegal organizations and for the propaganda of the party.

5. The Communist members shall make all their parliamentary work dependent on the work of the Party outside the parliament. The regular proposing of demonstrative measures, not for the purpose of having them passed by the bourgeois majority, but for the purpose of propaganda, agitation, and organization, must be carried on under the direction of the party and its Central Committee.

6. In the event of labor demonstrations in the streets or other revolutionary movements, the Communist members must occupy the most conspicuous place-- at the head of the proletarian masses.

7. The Communist deputies must try to get in touch (under the control of the party) with the revolutionary workingmen, peasants, and other workers either by correspondence or otherwise. They must in no way act like the Social Democratic deputies who carry on mere business relations with the constituents. They must always be at the disposal of the Communist organizations for propaganda work in the country.

8. Each Communist member must remember that he is not a "legislator" who is bound to seek agreements with the other legislators, but an agitator of the Party, detailed into the enemy's camp in order to carry out the orders of the Party there. The Communist member is answerable not to the wide mass of his constituents, but to his own Communist Party -- whether lawful or unlawful.

9. The Communist members must speak in parliament in such a way as to be understood by every workman, peasant, washerwoman, shepherd; so that the Party may publish his speeches and spread them to the most remote villages of the country.

10. The rank-and-file Communist worker must not shrink from speaking in the bourgeois parliaments, and not give way to the so-called experienced parliamentarians, even if such workingmen are novices in parliamentary methods. In case of need the workingmen members may read their speeches from notes, in order that the speech may be printed afterwards in the papers or in leaflet form.

11. The Communist members must make use of the parliamentary tribune to denounce not only the bourgeoisie and its hangers-on, but also for the denunciation of the social patriots, reformists, the half-and-half politicians of the centre and other opponents of Communism, and for the wide propagation of the ideas of the Third International.

12. The Communist members, even though there should be only one or two of them in the parliament, should by their whole conduct challenge capitalism, and never forget that only those are worthy of the name of Communists, who not in words only but in deeds are the mortal enemy of the bourgeois order and its social-patriotic flunkeys.

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